

READING ACHIEVEMENT AS AFFECTED BY SOCIO-  
ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS

READING ACHIEVEMENT AS AFFECTED BY SOCIO-  
ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS

A Field Report  
Presented to  
The Graduate Division  
Drake University

Approved by Committee:

*St Paul Blahly*  
Chairman

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of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

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Dean of the Graduate Division

by

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the "whole" child. It has been felt necessary to take into account individual differences and educate each child to his capacity. In educating the "whole" child, attempts have been made to help him not only prepare for the adult world, but also make the most of his present situation. In theory, each child is taught as an individual. In practice, much of the curriculum in the school has been centered around the "average" child in a middle class society.<sup>1</sup>

During the first years of school, the emphasis has been placed on the skill of reading. More time has been devoted to the development of this skill than to any other one area. This emphasis on reading as an opening wedge to the world of knowledge has been based on the assumption that children have a desire to understand the written word. It has been assumed that children have a store of past oral experiences that will lead to a meaningful understanding of the stories they read.

This assumption has usually held true for the child

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, *Social Class and Child Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 15-16.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern theory of education, it has often been said that it was the responsibility of the school to teach the "whole" child. It has been felt necessary to take into account individual differences and educate each child to his capacity. In educating the "whole" child, attempts have been made to help him not only prepare for the adult world, but also make the most of his present situation. In theory, each child is taught as an individual. In practice, much of the curriculum in the school has been centered around the "average" child in a middle class society.<sup>1</sup>

During the first years of school, the emphasis has been placed on the skill of reading. More time has been devoted to the development of this skill than to any other one area. This emphasis on reading as an opening wedge to the world of knowledge has been based on the assumption that children have a desire to understand the written word. It has been assumed that children have a store of personal experiences that will lead to a meaningful understanding of the stories they read.

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<sup>1</sup> Allison Davis, Social-Class Influences Upon Learning (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 88-89.

from the middle class home. He can look upon Dick, Jane, and Sally as people he might have known and their experiences are similar to the ones he might have encountered.

For the child who seldom sees Daddy go off to work, who has ten or twelve brothers and sisters instead of two, who lives in a house quite different from the ones pictured in the primer, these stories must seem little like what he has experienced.

These children from the low socio-economic areas have received the same basic instruction in this skill of reading as children from middle and upper socio-economic sections of the city. They have used the same basic text books and are measured by the same measuring devices.

What, then, of their achievement in the reading skill? Has their background been an important factor in their learning? It can be assumed that the majority of these children will have scored on the lower range on the percentile scale in reading. The question is whether they have been able to maintain their position on that scale and proceed at an even rate of growth throughout these first school years when reading has been the major skill emphasized.

In order to help the child learn, the teacher himself must discover I. THE PROBLEM points from which the child starts. Specifically, the teacher must learn a good deal about the cultural environment and his culture. Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to determine whether or not fifty-six sixth-grade child-

ren from socio-economically underprivileged and/or Spanish-speaking homes have progressed in reading, on the average, at a rate consistent with "normal" expectation.

Importance of the problem. If the fifty-six children being studied have scored at approximately the same average level on the percentile scale at each grade level and thereby show a consistent growth pattern, it may be an indication that the school has met the needs of these children and the socio-economic and cultural status of the family had little bearing on reading achievement.

However, if the reading percentile scores showed an erratic or downward trend, it might be an indication that the school has not met the needs of these children, and because of the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the home, a change is required in the reading program.

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Some children have library cards so early that, having enjoyed a book, they rebel against taking it back. Others have read one through. Teachers need to know which are which. Many writers in the fields of education, sociology, and psychology have considered the influences of the socio-economic level of the family on the intelligence and achievement of students. Allison Davis said:

*Ibid.* p. 1.

In order to help the child learn, the teacher himself must discover the reference points from which the child starts. Specifically, the teacher must learn a good deal about the cultural environment and his cultural motivation, if the teacher is to guide the child's new learning effectively. This necessity for learning

*Yearbook of the National Society of Education, Part II, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 225.*



the basic culture of the pupil is especially urgent for teachers who work with children of the lower socio-economic groups.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the socio-economic environment was referred to by Sargent, who said:

His socio-economic status limits and defines the social contacts a child will have. It affects mainly aspects of his personality that develop through social interaction -- namely, attitudes, interests, values, and habits. Before a child is born, his socio-economic status is pretty clearly defined by his parents' position in society.<sup>2</sup>

Dora Smith held similar views on the importance of the home environment and its influences on learning, especially on learning to read:

One child comes from a home where he has a whole shelf of "Book Friends" he can call his own; where his mother or father read to him regularly as a part of the daily ritual of going to bed. Another child lives between four bare walls. He has never seen a book in his parents' hands. There is none in the home. When ten cents or sixty cents are available they are spent for a comic book or a movie -- or perhaps for food, shelter or clothing.

Some children have library cards so early that, having enjoyed a book, they rebel against taking it back. Others have never sought a book of their own volition, have never read one through. Teachers need to know which are which. They need to study the reading environment surrounding each child.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>S. Stanfield Sargent, Social Psychology (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Dora Smith, "Reading Programs in the Early Primary Period," Reading in the Elementary School, Forty-eight Yearbook of the National Society of Education, Part II, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 225.

Guy Bond, another author in the field of elementary reading, has noted the individual differences that are the result of home attitudes:

Although it is true that no one characteristic of the home seems to be causally related to the achievement in reading, when intelligence and other factors are controlled, it stands to reason that the influence of a child's home life sometimes makes a great difference in his achievement in reading. ... Compare the home in which there are no books or magazines at all. The parents may neither have the time nor the ability to help the child learn to read. Perhaps because reading plays no role in their lives, they may minimize its importance to their youngster.<sup>1</sup>

Richard H. Russell said:

Children differ in reading readiness factors or in reading abilities because of heredity and environmental factors which tend to reinforce one another. The child who achieves early success in reading may do so because of stimulating home background which was full of story-telling, rhyme-learning, picture study, conversation adapted to children, and other influences affecting reading readiness and primary reading skills.<sup>2</sup>

F. H. Finch and A. J. Hoehn believed that the relationship between the socio-cultural background and the development of the individual was slight. Their thoughts concerning the influence of the socio-economic status and pupil adjustment to mental achievement are summarized below:

This is not to say that there is no relationship

<sup>1</sup> Guy L. Bond, Adapting Instruction in Reading to Individual Differences, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> David H. Russell, "Reading in the Early Primary Period," Reading in the Elementary School, p. 23.



between elements in the environment and mental growth, personality development, or emotional adjustment. Numerous studies have reported low correlations between socio-economic status and these aspects of development.<sup>1</sup>

J. Crosby Chapman and D. M. Wiggins have advanced the theory that there is a relationship between family size and the ability to learn. They have proposed that there is "a tendency for the more prolific families to possess children of lower intelligence."<sup>2</sup>

Allison Davis believed that the school was placing undue emphasis on the teaching of reading in the early years. He suggested that this was not the best method of teaching the child from the low socio-cultural class.

Just as we have been taught by our narrow academic culture both to stereotype our intelligence test problems and to accord the highest educational values to linguistic training, so also we have been led by scholastic culture to overrate reading as a means of developing mental processes. Reading is made the basis of the child's mental training in the first school years. Upon this basis he is usually segregated into one of the classrooms or the school's homogeneous "ability groups." Through his early classroom experiences in learning to read, and through the accompanying prestige or stigma he meets in the classroom, the child's basic concept of his mental adequacy is learned.

Does reading deserve this high place in the first

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<sup>1</sup>F. H. Finch and A. J. Hoehn, "Measuring Socio-Economic or Cultural Status: A Comparison of Methods", Journal of Social Psychology, 33: 51-67, February, 1951.

<sup>2</sup>J. Crosby Chapman and D. M. Wiggins, "Relation of Family Size to the Intelligence of the Offspring and the Socio-economic Status of the Family", Pedagogical Seminary, 32: 414-412, September, 1925.

three or four years of schooling? My observations and interviews in nearly five hundred classrooms during the last four years lead me to doubt that reading helps the young child learn to solve the basic types of mental problems. In our schools reading consists chiefly of learning to recognize written symbols, to pronounce them, and to paraphrase them. These trainings are carried on in the classroom day in and day out, year after year, and receive the greatest emphasis from the teacher. Yet, it seems clear to me that they stimulate only a very narrow range of thought processes.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the function of the school, Davis has said:

The academic function of the school is to help the child learn how to solve a wide range of mental problems. Of how much value is reading in helping the young child learn to solve mental problems? In the simple stories which he reads and paraphrases, all the problems except those of vocabulary, word recognition, and syntax are solved for him by the writer. He learns a new and important concept only once in a blue moon from his primer; even then, he learns it chiefly by memory and by simple association. In other words, there is little chance for the child to learn to recognize, to define, and to analyze problems in any exploratory or empirical way in reading; in his primer, he simply learns to decode someone's thoughts about a cat, or a grandmother, or a circus, or a trip to the country.

One must recognize, therefore, that the experiences symbolized in the child's books usually do not interest him. The stories seem foolish to lower-class children because the experiences appear unreal, the words strange.

Thus reading fails to give pupils any great skill in solving problems (1) because it limits its problems to purely verbal ones, and (2) because its problems are felt by the pupil to have little importance in his life outside the school.

The basic criticism of the school's great emphasis upon reading, therefore, is this: Reading teaches too little skill in problem-solving (either of a rational,

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Walter Harach, *Parents and Children in the School* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1939), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Allison Davis, *op. cit.* p. 91.

empirical, or inventive kind) to justify the first place it holds in the curriculum. Learning the skill of decoding written communication is important, but not so important for the development of mental ability as the pupil's analysis of his own experience, and his drawing of correct inferences from this analysis.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the reading program as an instrument in learning has thus been questioned by Davis. An author who held the opposite view toward this part of the curriculum was Dorothy Baruch. She pointed out the many enjoyments that result from reading. Her views were similar to by those held by most teachers as they introduce children to the world of books.

All though the years books may be a source of enjoyment, of enrichment, of gain in new knowledge, of increased insight into every realm of human life and endeavor.<sup>2</sup>

In 1954, Kent Rayburn Granzow made a study of the reading achievement of the students in the Denver Public Schools. Among his findings as a result of this study he reported:

1. The underachievers in reading came from homes of lower socio-economic status.
2. The percentage of parents who are indifferent to reading was higher for the underachievers in reading.
3. The parents of underachievers in reading had fewer educational advantages.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-95.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Walter Baruch, Parents and Children Go to School (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1939), p. 309.

4. A smaller percentage of the underachievers in reading were living with both parents; more changes in family structure took place at a time when these pupils were expected to learn to read.

5. The underachievers in reading were achieving at a lower level in both arithmetic and language.<sup>1</sup>

The sociologists in the field of class structure have shown an interest in the effect of socio-economic factors that effect education. The factors to be considered in classifying people into various class levels as described by these sociologists aids in the understanding of these children who are labeled as members of the lower socio-economic class.

It is important to know just what contributing factors influence these children. Just how do they differ from children in other areas of the city?

The authors in social classification differed as to what constituted a social level. Although there was a divergence of view on the importance of the contributing factors, there was general agreement as to the presence of a definite class structure. The views of seven authorities in the field are presented here.

<sup>1</sup> Kent Rayburn Granzow, "A Comparison study of Under-achievers, Normal Achievers and Overachievers in Reading" (unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1954 as summarized in Dissertation Abstracts, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Vol. XIV, No. 4 1954), p. 631.



The Lynds, in Middletown, attribute social rank to the chance place of birth.<sup>1</sup> Whether one is born on the "right" or "wrong" side of the tracks is a determining factor in his social culture. <sup>habitants upon the basis of types of moral emotions, manners, rituals, economic traits and other differentiated symbols of rank.</sup>

Shevsky and Lewin felt that social rank was composed of three factors: level of occupation, level of education, and level of income.<sup>2</sup> <sup>The views of James West on social rank were paraphrased in A Sociological Pattern to Education. They were:</sup>

<sup>In essence, it is a "prestige structure," a rating of values. West believed these values to be residence, who "live in the same way," that is possess the same and these positions "in toto" constitute one or more lower middle class, working class, and the lower class. He</sup>  
Kahl differed from many other authors in his classifications of classes. He has divided the social rank into five groupings. They were the upper class, upper-middle class, lower middle class, working class, and the lower class. He defined the working class and the lower class in this manner:

**Working Class.** Factory and similar semi-skilled workers. These are the people who work from day to day; they live adequately but on a small margin, have little hope of rising, aim at getting by. They are the graduates of grammar schools, with often some high school training.

**Lower Class.** People who have the lowest paid jobs, work irregularly (especially in bad times), live in slums. They usually have not gone beyond grammar school (and often have not finished it), their family life is unstable, their reputations poor, and their values are based on apathy or aggression, for they have no hope.<sup>3</sup> <sup>were subjects for this study.</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In order to establish the socio-economic status of R. S. and H. M. Lynd, Middletown, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, Inc. 1929), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Eshref Shevsky and Molly Lewin, Your Neighborhood. A Social Profile of Los Angeles, (Los Angeles: The Haynes Foundation, 1949), p. 6. <sup>ville U.S.A. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945) as paraphrased in Lloyd Allen Cook and El</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Kahl, The American Class Structure, (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 216. <sup>ook Company, Inc. 1950), p. 88.</sup>

Allison Davis expressed himself on what constituted social rank when he said:

Social strata are developed and recognized by the inhabitants upon the basis of types of moral sanctions, language, manners, rituals, economic traits and other differentiated symbols of rank.<sup>1</sup>

The views of James West on social rank were paraphrased in A Sociological Pattern to Education. They were:

In essence, it is a "prestige structure," a rating of people by people who claim to know them in terms of status values. West believed these values to be residence, technology, lineage, wealth, morals and manners. People who "live in the same way," that is passes the same values, tend to be grouped into general prestige positions and those positions "in toto" constitute one or more basic class levels.<sup>2</sup>

These were but a few of the meanings that could be found expressed by different authors on what constitutes a socio-economic level.

### III. PROCEEDURES

Fifty-six children who were in the sixth grade in Dunlap School, Des Moines, Iowa, during the school year 1959-1960 were subjects for this study.

In order to establish the socio-economic status of

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<sup>1</sup>Davis, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>James West, Plainville U.S.A. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945) as paraphrased in Lloyd Allen Cook and Elaine Forsyth Cook, A Sociological Pattern to Education, (second edition New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, Inc. 1950), p. 88.

these children, a study was made of their homes. The cumulative records kept by the school and written reports by the children were used to discover (1) the number of people living in the home, (2) a physical description of the homes--number of rooms, modern or not modern, (3) the source of family income and/or occupation of the parents, (4) the stability of the homes, and (5) the language spoken in the home.

Health records were considered as a part of the socioeconomic background of the pupils and as a possible factor in reading achievement.

In determining the growth in reading achievement, a mean percentile score was computed at each of the five successive grade levels for which scores were available. These were charted or graphed in comparison to the norms for the city.

The I. Q. level of the children was considered as a possible explanation of reading accomplishment.

All classes had regularly scheduled times for the library and gymnasium.

The school auditorium was used for television taping, assemblies, films, music programs, and meetings of the P. T. A.

The playground, directly north of the school building,



joined a baseball diamond that belonged to the city.

## CHAPTER II

Although the area was very low, and flooded with every heavy

SCHOOL SITUATION WHERE STUDY WAS MADE. Part of the school play area was covered with blacktop, which pre-

I. DESCRIPTION OF DUNLAP SCHOOL  
vided some protection during inclement weather.

This study was made at Dunlap Elementary School, located at South East Eleventh and Railroad Avenue in Des Moines, Iowa. The school was constructed during 1951 and 1952. It opened for the first time in the fall of 1952.

It was a one story, U-shaped building containing eighteen classrooms. In addition to the classrooms, there was a library, auditorium, gymnasium (which also served as a cafeteria), nurse's office and isolation room, principal's office, work room, and supply rooms.

Two of the classrooms were devoted to "special" or mentally retarded children.

The Dunlap Elementary School staff consisted of a principal, a nurse, a speech therapist, and seventeen classroom teachers.

All classes had regularly scheduled times for the library and gymnasium.

The school auditorium was used for television viewing, assemblies, films, music programs, and meetings of the P. T. A.

The playground, directly north of the school building,

joined a baseball diamond that belonged to the city. Although the area was very low, and flooded with every heavy rain, it did allow ample play area in good weather. Part of the school play area was covered with blacktop, which provided some protection during inclement weather.

## II. THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Physical Description. The school district was bounded on the west and south by the Des Moines River, on the north by the G.R.I. & P. railroad tracks, and on the east by South East Twentieth Street.

Highways 65 and 69 were a block from the school. There were two large motor freight terminals within Dunlap District. In addition to the tracks of the C.R.I. & P. Railroad which formed the north boundary of the school district, the tracks of the C.B. & Q. and the C.G.W. railroads intersected the area. Many children had to cross one or more railroad tracks on their way to and from school. The Des Moines River was one block south of the school building.

Toward the eastern edge of the school district, there were three large packing plants, two rendering companies, and several sheep "ranches." South of the packing plants and east of the school, was the city dump. The odor from these places was quite offensive and often strong enough to be noticeable at the school.

point for much of the social activity of the Spanish speaking population in the area. Recreation. Allen Park, Hawthorne Park, and the baseball diamond adjacent to the school all provided supervised recreation during the summer months.

Roadside Settlement House, located at South East Seventh and Scott Streets, had for many years been the gathering point for the neighborhood. In addition to the Resident Director, Roadside employed four other recreation workers where ten or more persons were living. The largest of the families represented in the study had nineteen people living in the home. Twenty-five pupils were from homes of more than five but less than ten. Seventeen were living in homes occupied by five or fewer. The average number living in the home, shop, laundry, and shower facilities. A branch of the Public library was maintained within Roadside. The library was open one day a week.

Churches. Several denominations had churches or missions within the school boundaries. The Salvation Army maintained a chapel and played an important part in the social, economic, and spiritual lives of many families. Other Protestant groups also had churches or houses that were used for services.

One of the churches which probably served as the largest influence culturally on the Mexican population, was that maintained by the Catholic Church. Guadeloupe Chapel conducted many of its services in Spanish and was the focal point for much of the social activity of the Spanish speaking population in the area.

point for much of the social activity of the Spanish speaking population in the area.

### III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE PUPILS

*Source of family income.* Twenty-five of the children

Housing. Many of the children in this neighborhood came from homes where crowded living conditions prevailed. Fourteen of the children in the present study, came from homes where ten or more persons were living. The largest of the families represented in the study, had nineteen people living in the home. Twenty-five pupils were from homes of more than five but less than ten. Seventeen were living in homes occupied by five or fewer. The average number living in the home, based on the information on the cumulative records, was 7.44.

In order to determine the size of the houses, written reports from fifty-five of the pupils were obtained. It was impossible to obtain a report from one child. According to the information on the fifty-five reports, the average number of rooms was 3.98. The range on housing ran from two people living in five rooms to the other extreme of thirteen occupying a three-room house.

Of the fifty-five children reporting on their homes, a thirty-nine or 70.5 per cent described their homes as modern. Sixteen reported their homes as having no water or plumbing. Two said they did not have electricity. or almost 27 per cent. Fifty-eight per cent of the children reported that of



their families either owned or were in the process of buying their homes. Forty-two percent of the families rented their homes. The number of moves of the families indicated that

Source of family income. Twenty-five of the children came from homes where the family income was Aid To Dependent Children. Twenty-seven of the parents listed themselves as laborers on the school records. This number represented a little more than 48 per cent of the total parent population being considered. Two of the parents were employed in clerical jobs. Of the remaining thirteen parents or guardians, the following occupations were noted: a mason, a painter, a machine operator, a mechanic, a machinist, a landscaper, a T. V. repairman, a mail carrier, a service station attendant, a waiter, a checker, a deliveryman, and one retired laborer. This information on the source of the family income was obtained from the cumulative records and the emergency sheets of the pupils. to understand oral Spanish, although neither

While the school had no direct knowledge of the amount of income for each family, the sources of income gave an indication of the economic level of the families. Very few of the occupations suggested salaries that would be more than a minimum wage. and a supply of clothing which was given to

Family stability. Seventy-three per cent of the children lived with both parents. Fifteen, or almost 27 per cent, lived with one parent, grandparents, or another relative of

the family. This information was available on the cumulative records kept for each child.

The number of moves of the families indicated that this group of children had been a fairly stable group. Of the fifty-six children involved in this study, thirty-eight had attended Dunlap School since Kindergarten and had lived at the same address since starting school. Two had moved twice in the same period of six years. Three had moved three times; one had moved four times; one, five; and one had moved nine times since starting school.

Language spoken in the home. From the cumulative records and a knowledge of the families involved in the study, a survey of the language spoken in the homes was made. Seven of the fifty-six children (12 per cent) were bi-lingual. Two of these seven children spoke only Spanish at home and the other five spoke both English and Spanish while home. Four others claimed to understand oral Spanish, although neither they nor their parents spoke it. For the remaining children, English was the only language with which they were familiar.

School Health. Most of the children came to school appearing adequately clothed and fed. For those who did not, the school maintained a supply of clothing which was given to children who appeared most in need of it. Some of the children were also provided with hot lunches and a morning bottle of milk. Most children in the Dunlap district used the dental

The expense for those food items was borne by various business men, friends of faculty members, and the school.

In extreme cases, the visiting teacher investigated the finances of the family, and where it appeared that the family income was inadequate to provide for clothing, an order was left with the family which could be used to obtain clothing at the Thrift Shop at little or no expense to the family.

The medical needs of the children were usually met by either the county hospital or the Health Center.

During 1959, many of the city's dentists donated their services to fix the teeth of the children who most needed dental work.

In the past, it has been the practice for the dental hygienist to visit Dunlap once a year for inspection of teeth. The children's teeth were cleaned by the hygienist once every three years. Because of the large number of children with dental problems, the hygienist cleaned the teeth of the Dunlap children during both the 1958-1959 and the 1959-1960 school years. Because of the large number of children with dental problems, the hygienist cleaned the teeth of the Dunlap children during both the 1958-1959 and the 1959-1960 school years. Because of the large number of children with dental problems, the hygienist cleaned the teeth of the Dunlap children during both the 1958-1959 and the 1959-1960 school years.

In October, 1959, twenty-seven of the fifty-six children were noted as serious dental problems. The parents of these children were advised that their children needed immediate dental care.

Most children in the Dunlap district used the dental



facilities of the Health Center, rather than the services of private dentists. Many families neglected the teeth of their children until there was pain. With the limited number of appointments available at the Health Center, it was impossible to provide service for all those who needed dental care.

The children were examined by a school physician every third year. When they were examined in sixth grade, six of the fifty-six children involved in this study were deficient in nutritional areas. Three were suffering from apparent sight loss and recommendation was made for further eye examination. Three of the children had heart murmurs. ~~not present.~~

One of the children had a history of spinal meningitis, and one of heart surgery. Five of the children were wearing eye glasses. ~~surroundings.~~

The families studied in the Dunlap School District would seem to qualify for classification in the lower class according to the definition by Kahl.

People who have the lowest paid jobs, work irregularly (especially in bad times), live in slums. They usually have not gone beyond grammar school (and often have not finished it), their family life is unstable, their reputations poor, and their values based on apathy or aggression, for they have no hope.<sup>1</sup>

Seventy-four per cent of the families studied said that the wage earner was employed as an unskilled laborer or that they were receiving Public Aid. In the event of bad

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph A. Kahl, op. cit., p. 216.

times, these unskilled workers would probably be among the first to become unemployed. Their occupations also indicated that their level of education was not high.

A slum was defined as a thickly populated area marked by wretched living conditions. These people lived in a neighborhood where there was little city sewage. Almost 30 per cent of the families lived in homes that were not modern. The presence of packing plants, rendering plants, city dump and railroad tracks added to the undesirability of the area.

Twenty-seven per cent of the children studied lived in homes where either or both parents were not present.

Sixty-eight per cent of the families had lived in this district a minimum of six years suggesting that they were satisfied with their surroundings.

**First Grade. The Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test.** Form B,<sup>1</sup> was given in September, 1936. It sampled the child's experiences in the areas of similarities, copying, vocabulary, sentences, numbers and information. Each of the six subtests was individually timed. Each subtest, and the total of the six subtests, approximated a power test because of the generous timing. There was a break between subtests so that the children would not become fatigued. The total test score

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Gertrude H. Hildreth and Nellie L. Griffiths, **Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests**, revised (Yonkers-on Hudson: World Book Company, 1949).

reflected the child's sight, hearing, finger and arm dexterity, verbal understandings and quantitative understandings.

### CHAPTER III

#### PRESENTATION OF DATA

An investigation was made into the test scores in reading readiness and reading obtained by the fifty-six 1959-60 sixth grade children at Dunlap School, Des Moines. The scores were for each of the successive five grade levels.

Chapter III will be devoted to the presentation and interpretation of the information gathered from the pupils' test cards. All scores are reported in terms of Des Moines city percentiles.

Sixty-one per cent of the children scored at the 20th

#### I. TESTS USED TO MEASURE READING READINESS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

Table I indicates that the highest percentile score obtained at Dunlap was 60. The lowest score was 3. First grade. The Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test, Form R,<sup>1</sup> was given in September, 1954. It sampled the child's experiences in the areas of similarities, copying, vocabulary, sentences, numbers and information. Each of the six subtests was individually timed. Each subtest, and the total of the six subtests, approximated a power test because of the generous timing. There was a break between subtests so that the children would not become fatigued. The total test score

This test was administered in October, 1955. Gertrude H. Hildreth and Nellie L. Griffiths, Metropolitan Reading Readiness Tests, revised (Yonkers-on Hudson: World Book Company, 1949).

Ernest W. Tiggs and Willis W. Clark, California Achievement Test, Primary Reading, Form BB (Los Angeles: California Test Bureau, 1950).

reflected the child's abilities in sight, hearing, finger and arm dexterity, verbal understandings and quantitative understandings.

The total test score was an indication of the starting level of performance for the child in the academic areas of school.

The mean percentile score obtained by the children in first grade at Dunlap was 26.11. The mean percentile established for the city was 50. This average score of 50 for the city was reached or exceeded at Dunlap by only eight children.

The most commonly achieved score at Dunlap was 10.

Sixty-one per cent of the children scored at the 20th percentile or below.

Table I indicates that the highest percentile score obtained at Dunlap was 80. The lowest score was 5. There were fifty-four children for whom scores were available.

Second grade. In second grade, the test used was The California Achievement Test, Primary Reading, Form BB.<sup>1</sup>

It sampled vocabulary, reading of sentences and following directions, reading of short stories, and marking statements according to the information in each story. It was a test designed to sample reading vocabulary and reading comprehension. This test was administered in October, 1955.

Test. Primary Reading, Form AA.<sup>1</sup> was given. This was

<sup>1</sup>Ernest W. Tiegs and Willis W. Clark, California Achievement Test, Primary Reading, Form BB (Los Angeles: California Test Bureau, 1950).



administered on October, TABLE I

In third grade, the test scores for the entire group  
 PERCENTILE SCORES OBTAINED BY FIRST GRADE CHILDREN,  
 DUNLAP SCHOOL ON METROPOLITAN READING READINESS  
 TEST SEPTEMBER, 1954 DES MOINES CITY NORMS

Percentile Scores*	Frequency Distribution
80	2
70	3
60	2
50	1
40	5
30	8
20	12
10	17
5	4
N=54	

\* Reported and recorded at decile points only, except at the fifth and ninety-fifth percentiles.

Table II shows that on the California Test administered in second grade, the highest percentile score obtained at Dunlap was 80, and the lowest score was 5. Nineteen children (47.5%) were at the 20th percentile or lower.

Third grade. In third grade, The California Achievement Test, Primary Reading, Form AA,<sup>1</sup> was given. This was

\* Reported and recorded at decile points only, except at the fifth and ninety-fifth percentiles.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. Form AA.

administered on October, 1956.

In third grade, the test scores for the entire group of fifty-six children were available.

The mean percentile score on the California Test given in third grade was 24.20. This contrasted to the mean percentile score of 50 for the city. The highest score obtained at Dunlap was 90; the lowest, 5.

TABLE II  
PERCENTILE SCORES OBTAINED BY SECOND GRADE CHILDREN,  
DUNLAP SCHOOL ON THE CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TEST  
OCTOBER, 1955 DES MOINES CITY NORMS

Percentile Scores*	Frequency Distribution
80	1
70	2
60	1
50	3
40	8
30	6
20	6
10	5
5	8

N=40

\* Reported and recorded at decile points only, except at the fifth and ninety-fifth percentiles.

the chi Thirty-five of the fifty-six children (62.5%) obtained scores at or below the 20th percentile. Table III shows the distribution of scores in third grade.

Dr. Ho Fourth grade. In October, 1957, when these children were in fourth grade, they took the Durrell-Sullivan Reading Achievement Test, Form A.<sup>1</sup> The Durrell-Sullivan Test sampled

This was true because of more possible points in the vocabulary section and because some of the paragraphs contained words.

TABLE III  
PERCENTILE SCORES OBTAINED BY THIRD GRADE CHILDREN  
DUNLAP SCHOOL ON THE CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TEST  
OCTOBER, 1956 DES MOINES CITY NORMS

Percentile Scores*	Frequency Distribution
90	2
80	1
70	1
60	3
50	0
40	8
30	6
20	8
10	10
5	17
N = 56	

\*Reported and recorded at decile points only, except at the fifth and ninety-fifth percentiles.

<sup>1</sup> L. L. Kelley and others, Stanford Achievement Battery, Intermediate Form J, (Younkers-On-Hudson: The World Book Co., 1937).



the child's experiences in the areas of word meaning and paragraph meaning. The word meaning section had 75 possible points and the paragraph meaning section, 60. According to Dr. Howard Blanchard, Director, Guidance, Educational Research and Testing for the Des Moines Public Schools, the test was weighted in favor of the child with the better vocabulary. This was true because of more possible points in the vocabulary section and because some of the paragraphs contained words that would be unfamiliar to some fourth grade boys and girls. Table V shows the distribution of scores for the children in fifth grade.

The total test score was an indication of the level at which the child performed in the areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Table IV shows the percentile scores obtained by fifty-six children on the Durrell-Sullivan Reading Achievement Test. The highest score obtained was 83; the lowest, 1. The mean score for the fifty-six children was 22.03. Thirty-one of the children scored at the 20th percentile or below.

Fifth grade. The Stanford Achievement Battery, Intermediate, Form J,<sup>1</sup> was given in February, 1959. These children were then in fifth grade.

The Battery consisted of nine subtests. Three of these

Table VI shows the mean percentile scores of the fifty-

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<sup>1</sup>T. L. Kelley and others, Stanford Achievement Battery, Intermediate, Form J, (Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co. 1955).

subtests composed the reading section: paragraph meaning, word meaning, and study skills. The study skills test sampled experiences in reading charts and tables, map readings, use of the dictionary, sources and index. The other tests were what their names would imply.

The range of percentile scores obtained on the reading section of the Stanford Achievement Battery was from 66 to 1. The mean percentile score for Dunlap was 16.91. Almost 70% of the children achieved at the 20th percentile or below.

Table V shows the distribution of scores for the children in fifth grade.

## II. DUNLAP SCORES IN COMPARISON TO CITY SCORES

When the mean percentile scores obtained by the fifty-six children at Dunlap were tabulated in comparison to the norms established for the city, the Dunlap scores were considerably lower on the percentile scale. The average or mean score for the city was, by definition, constant at fifty. The mean for Dunlap showed a slight rise in second grade when only forty of the fifty-six children were tested. From second grade through fifth grade there was a downward trend in the scores.

Table VI shows the mean percentile scores of the fifty-six Dunlap children in relation to the mean percentile scores for the city of Des Moines.

TABLE IV

PERCENTILE SCORES OBTAINED BY FOURTH GRADE CHILDREN,  
 DUNLAP CHILDREN ON DURRELL-SULLIVAN ACHIEVEMENT  
 TEST OCTOBER, 1957 DES MOINES CITY NORMS

Percentile Score Range	Frequency Distribution
81 - 85	1
76 - 80	0
71 - 75	1
66 - 70	0
61 - 65	0
56 - 60	2
51 - 55	5
46 - 50	1
41 - 45	0
36 - 40	0
31 - 35	5
26 - 30	1
21 - 25	9
16 - 20	5
11 - 15	6
6 - 10	7
1 - 5	13
N = 56	

TABLE V

PERCENTILE READING ACHIEVEMENT SCORES BY DUNLAP FIFTH GRADE  
CHILDREN OF THE STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT BATTERY, INTER-  
MEDIATE, FEBRUARY, 1959 DES MOINES CITY NORMS

Percentile Score Range		Frequency Distribution				
		Grade 2 1954-55	Grade 3 1955-56	Grade 4 1956-57	Grade 5 1957-58	Grade 5 1958-59
Dunlap	66 - 70				1	
	61 - 65				0	
	56 - 60	26.11	28.50	24.20	22.00	16.91
	51 - 55				0	
Des Moines	46 - 50	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00
	41 - 45				3	
	36 - 40				0	
	31 - 35				4	
	26 - 30				4	
	21 - 25				4	
	16 - 20				7	
	11 - 15				8	
	6 - 10				8	
	1 - 5				16	
		N = 56				

The same comparison of scores is shown in the graph in Figure 1.



TABLE VI

MEAN PERCENTILE RANK IN READING READINESS (GRADE 1)  
AND READING, SELECTED DUNLAP SCHOOL CHILDREN  
COMPARED WITH DES MOINES CITY AVERAGES  
DES MOINES CITY NORMS

	Grade 1 1954-55	Grade 2 1955-56	Grade 3 1956-57	Grade 4 1957-58	Grade 5 1958-59
Dunlap	26.11	28.50	24.20	22.03	16.91
Des Moines	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00	50.00

Rank

The same comparison of scores is shown in the graph  
in Figure 1.

MEAN PERCENTILE RANK IN READING READINESS (GRADE 1)  
AND READING, SELECTED DUNLAP SCHOOL CHILDREN  
COMPARED WITH DES MOINES CITY AVERAGES, DES MOINES CITY NORMS

### III. READING ACHIEVEMENT AND I. Q.

When the Intelligence Quotient scores of the children  
were studied and tabulated, there did not seem to be an  
appreciable difference in the pattern of scores  
among the various I. Q. groups.

The I. Q. scores that were used for this study were

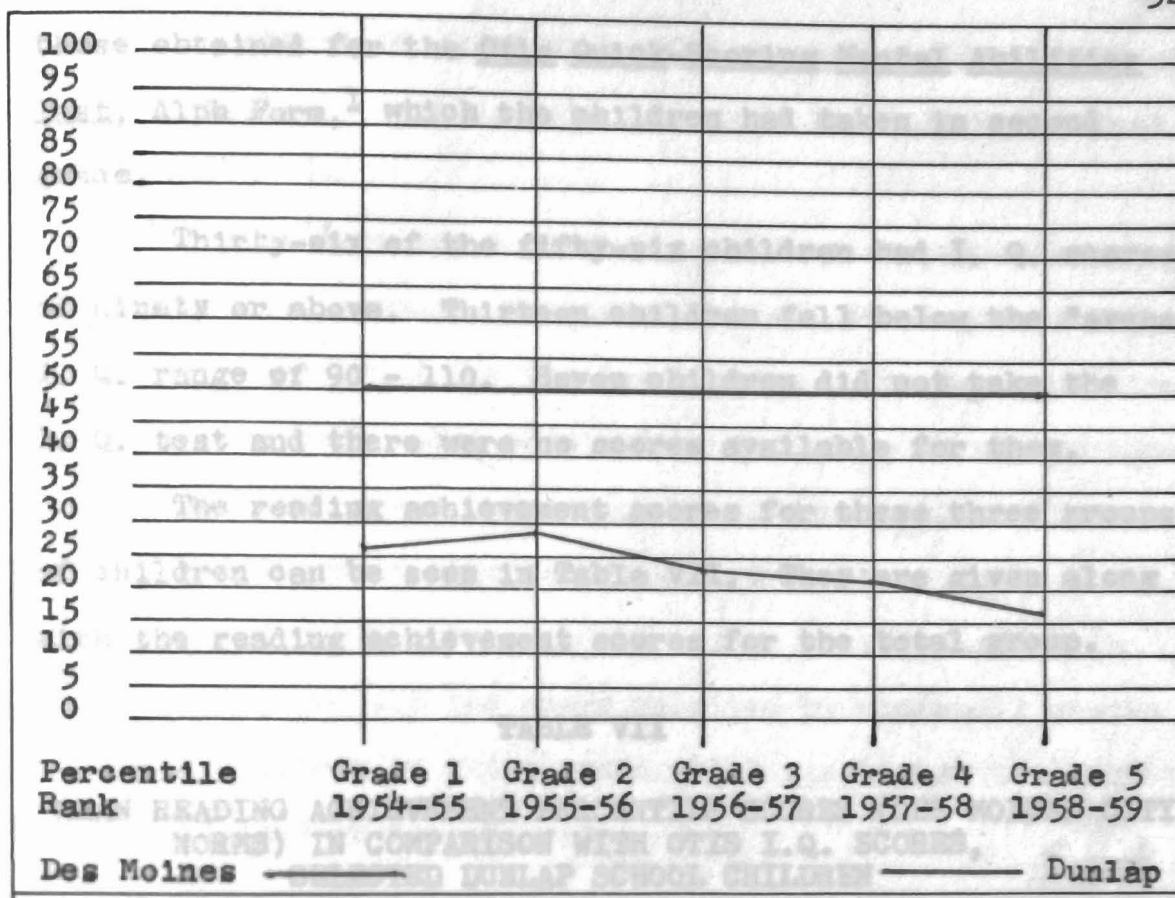


FIGURE I

MEAN PERCENTILE RANK IN READING READINESS AND READING ACHIEVEMENT, SELECTED DUNLAP SCHOOL CHILDREN COMPARED WITH DES MOINES CITY AVERAGES, DES MOINES CITY NORMS

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Total Children	26.11	28.40	24.29	22.03	16.91
90 or above					
75 - 90					
60 - 75					
45 - 60					
30 - 45					
15 - 30					
Below 15					

### III. READING ACHIEVEMENT AND I.Q.

When the Intelligence Quotient Scores of the children were studied and tabulated, there did not seem to be an appreciable difference in the pattern of score distribution among the various I. Q. groups.

The I. Q. scores that were used for this study were

1. Arthur S. Otis, *Otis Quick-Screening Mental Ability Test* (Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co. 1953).

those obtained for the Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Abilities Test, Alph Form,<sup>1</sup> which the children had taken in second grade.

Thirty-six of the fifty-six children had I. Q. scores of ninety or above. Thirteen children fell below the "average" I. Q. range of 90 - 110. Seven children did not take the I. Q. test and there were no scores available for them.

The reading achievement scores for these three groups of children can be seen in Table VII. They are given along with the reading achievement scores for the total group.

TABLE VII

MEAN READING ACHIEVEMENT PERCENTILE SCORES (DES MOINES CITY NORMS) IN COMPARISON WITH OTIS I.Q. SCORES, SELECTED DUNLAP SCHOOL CHILDREN

	Grade 1* 1954-55	Grade 2* 1955-56	Grade 3 1956-57	Grade 4 1957-58	Grade 5 1958-59
Total Group					
56 children	26.11	28.50	24.20	22.03	16.91
I.Q. 90 or above					
36 children	29.39	27.19	26.33	23.91	18.03
I.Q. 75 - 90					
13 children	18.84	16.81	15.00	13.57	6.76
I.Q. Undetermined					
7 children	25.00	62.50	34.28	27.43	27.00

\* Scores not available for total population. See Tables I and II.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur S. Otis, Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test (Younkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co. 1953).

and of It should be noted that of the seven children with undetermined I. Q. scores, only four took the California Test in second grade.

While there was a difference in the scores obtained by the three I. Q. groups, the trend for all three groups was similar to the trend for the total group. The two exceptions were (1) the high score obtained by the group of undetermined I. Q. in second grade, when a group of four children had scores sufficiently high to bring their mean score up above the level of achievement for the entire group recorded in first grade; and (2) the score received by the small sample of seven children in third grade which was higher than the score obtained in second grade.

The scores obtained by the children with "below average" I. Q. scores was consistently lower than the average percentile score for the total group but the pattern established by this group is similar to the pattern set by the "average or better" group. of 70, 80, 90, 83, and 66. She was also among the

Two of the three I. Q. groups reported in Table VII, showed a consistant downward trend in their average scores.

While no attempt has been made to compare the I. Q. level of the Dunlap children in this study, with that for the entire Des Moines School population, the usual relationship of low I. Q. test performance to low socio-economic status is well-known. The relative influence of intelligence



and of socio-economic and cultural factors on school achievement remains an unsettled question. The concern of this study is with the year-to-year trend of the Dunlap children's achievement in reading, rather than with their absolute achievement status relative to the Des Moines norms.

#### IV. HEALTH FACTORS IN READING ACHIEVEMENT

According to the information available on the school's health record cards, forty-eight of the fifty-six children had some physical defects. These defects were brought to the school's attention by examinations by the school physician, or by the school nurse. The parents also supplied the school with information about past illnesses.

The noted defects ranged from teeth and nutritional deficiencies to a history of spinal meningitis.

The youngster who had a history of spinal meningitis as well as severe dental problems had reading percentile scores of 70, 80, 90, 83, and 66. She was also among the group with an undetermined I. Q.

Table VIII shows the reading scores of the children suffering from nutritional deficiencies, and the children with severe dental problems in comparison with the average percentile scores for the entire group.

Although many of the children were thought to be suffering from dental and nutritional deficiencies, their

TABLE VIII

READING ACHIEVEMENT SCORES FOR THE CHILDREN WITH DENTAL AND  
NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCIES AS COMPARED TO THE MEAN  
READING SCORES ACHIEVED BY THE TOTAL GROUP

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or  
not fifty-six sixth-grade children who were underprivileged and Spanish-speaking had progressed

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Total Group					
56 children	26.11	28.50	24.20	22.03	16.91
Nutritional Cases					
6 children	30.63	40.00	35.00	33.00	24.17
Dental Problems					
27 children	31.36	31.17	30.00	29.23	21.23

Willap School, Des Moines, Iowa, during the school year 1959-  
1960.

test scores indicated that their reading achievement pattern

The socio-economic status of these children was des-  
cribed in terms of their homes. Factors considered were (1)  
not afflicted.

the number of people living in the home, (2) the source of  
family income, (3) the stability of the home, and (4) the  
physical description of the home. The linguistic background  
was described in terms of the language spoken in the home.

Health records were studied both as a factor in the  
socio-economic background of the pupils, and as a possible  
explanation of reading patterns.

A mean reading percentile score in terms of Des Moines  
city norms was computed for each of the five successive grade  
levels for which scores were available and they were tabulated  
in comparison to the mean percentile scores established for

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### I. SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not fifty-six sixth-grade children from socio-economically underprivileged and Spanish-speaking homes have progressed in reading, on the average, at a rate consistent with "normal" expectation. Dunlap School children represent, largely, a low

The subjects in this study were fifty-six children in Dunlap School, Des Moines, Iowa, during the school year 1959-1960. at a lower level on the percentile scale than the average

The socio-economic status of these children was described in terms of their homes. Factors considered were (1) the number of people living in the home, (2) the source of family income, (3) the stability of the home, and (4) the physical-description of the home. The linguistic background was described in terms of the language spoken in the home.

Health records were studied both as a factor in the socio-economic background of the pupils, and as a possible explanation of reading patterns.

A mean reading percentile score in terms of Des Moines city norms was computed for each of the five successive grade levels for which scores were available and they were tabulated in comparison to the mean percentile scores established for

the city. The Intelligence Quotient level of the children did not. The I. Q. scores of the children were studied to determine whether the pattern of reading achievement was altered by the intelligence level of the children. of the reading scores, careful attention should be given in the reading program.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

From the data gathered, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. Dunlap School children represent, largely, a low socio-economic group.
2. The reading achievement of Dunlap School children was at a lower level on the percentile scale than the average achievement of children in the city of Des Moines.
3. The reading progress of Dunlap School children was not at an average or "normal" rate. In terms of Des Moines city norms, it dropped from a mean percentile of 26.11 in first grade to one of 16.91 in fifth grade.
4. With the exception of the mean score obtained in second grade when the population was greatly reduced because of absences during testing, the pattern in reading scores was downward at each successive grade level.
5. There was a high percentage of children suffering from physical defects, but the presence of these defects did not apparently alter the reading achievement pattern of these children from the pattern set by the total group.



6. The Intelligence Quotient level of the children did not apparently alter the pattern of reading achievement.

7. Because of the low level of achievement on the standardized test, and the downward trend of the reading scores, careful attention should be given in the reading program. While it might not be expected that these children would

meet the standards for the city, if they were progressing at a "normal" rate of growth they would maintain the same position on the

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the opinions expressed by the authorities reviewed for this study, there seemed to be general agreement on the following points.<sup>1</sup>

1. There is a need for a reading readiness program to build experiences from which meaningful relationships for reading can be made by the child.
2. Teachers need to know and understand the background of their students.
3. Each child is unique; that is, each child progresses at his own speed and in his own way. Attention by the teacher to the individual differences of children is necessary.
4. The reading materials supplied to the children to aid in the mastery of the reading skill should be aids for learning and not standards in themselves.

<sup>1</sup>e.g. Baruch, Bond, Davis, Smith, Russell

These children, then, start their formal reading at

<sup>1</sup>Hildreth, loc. cit.

5. Children need to meet with some degree of success in the early stages of reading.

The pattern of reading percentile scores as shown in Table VIII, indicates that the present reading program may not be completely meeting the needs of Dunlap School children. While it might not be expected that these children would meet the standards for the city, if they were progressing at a "normal" rate of growth they would maintain the same position on the percentile scale from first through fifth grade. Their scores should show a consistency at the beginning percentile rank.

In first grade, when the children were measured by the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test<sup>1</sup>, their scores indicated that an extensive readiness program was needed. For those children to start formal reading on a par with children from other areas of the city, they would first need to build a background for reading.

The time spent in developing this program of readiness is going to be greater among these groups with limited backgrounds than among children with more advantageous backgrounds. As the teacher and student create a readiness for learning, the time devoted to the enrichment program is deducted from the time that in another situation would be spent on formal reading. These children, then, start their formal reading at

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<sup>1</sup>Hildreth, loc. cit.

a later date than other children. Yet on the present measuring devices, they are measured, not on how much they have grown, but rather on how much of the formal reading program they have mastered.

Since so much additional time must be spent in allowing these children to build meaningful relationships and to become accustomed to the materials that are provided, they drop further behind the expected level of achievement for a particular grade level. Even though the child may be growing, his starting point was so much lower that his actual rate of accomplishment is not reflected by the standardized tests.

In view of the opinions expressed by the various authors on the need of recognizing the child as unique, and the importance of dealing with individual differences, the following suggestions are made as a possible means of better meeting the needs of Dunlap School children.

1. The incorporation of a system of grouping which would replace grades one, two, and three with a primary block, and grades four, five, and six with a second or advanced block. This type of grouping would allow for the time necessary to provide an enlarged readiness or enrichment program, and would allow for the varying tempos of the children's growth. It would allow the slower learner an opportunity to grow and develop at his own speed without the stigma of failure. The time spent in these larger blocks would vary. Some

children would complete them in three years, while many others would spend four years covering the skills necessary for more advanced work.

In such a grouping situation, the child would remain with the same teacher and approximately the same peer group throughout the period of time necessary to complete the block. This would enable the teacher to better know and understand the background, capabilities, and needs of his students. He would then be able to provide a more meaningful enrichment program for them.

2. In order to provide for individual attention to the needs of the children and to help provide the meaningful experiences necessary for a higher degree of success in reading, the size of the classes should be kept at a minimum.

3. When the formal reading program is begun by these children from the lower socio-economic groups, an effort should be made to use a reading series more closely akin to that which is familiar to them. Stories and pictures that would more closely reflect their own backgrounds would aid in the development of an interest in reading.

4. It is further suggested that the school provide a measuring device that would more accurately measure the experiences and the growth of these children and not compare them with the norms established for the city until they have completed elementary school. Or if a more frequent testing



program is felt necessary, the children might be tested when they begin school, at the end of the primary block, and again at the end of the advanced block.

Since the children at Dunlap School have not maintained their initial position on the percentile scale, and there has been a downward trend in their percentile ranking, it would seem that some change from the present program might be tried.

If the primary and advanced groupings were put into effect, and if the teacher and pupil spent several years working and living together in a group small enough to allow for individual attention, the child might be better prepared emotionally and mentally for reading. There would be sufficient time to allow for suitable experiences; and with materials chosen with his background in mind, his chance for success in reading would be enhanced.

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